

BEFORE THE
FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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MUR # 7008

Brad Woodhouse
American Democracy Legal Fund
455 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Complainant,

v.

Mr. Jon Keyser
P.O. Box 1168
Morrison, CO 80465

Respondent.

COMPLAINT

This complaint is filed under 52 U.S.C. § 30109(a)(1) against former State Rep. Jon Keyser for violating the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the "Act") and Federal Election Commission (the "Commission") regulations, as described below. Publicly available reports indicate that Mr. Keyser violated the Act and Commission regulations by soliciting \$3 million dollars in soft money for his Senate campaign and coordinating with these outside groups on future spending. We urge the Commission to investigate this apparent violation.

A. FACTS

Jon Keyser was a Republican legislator from Colorado and is seeking the Republican nomination for the 2016 U.S. Senate race.¹ National Republicans actively recruited Mr. Keyser to run against Democratic senator Michael Bennet.²

¹ Mark K. Matthews, *Jon Keyser Announces 2016 Senate Bid Amid Crowded Colorado Field*, Denver Post (Jan. 11, 2016, 12:02 PM), http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_29370305/jon-keyser-announces-2016-senate-bid-amid-crowded.

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As part of the recruitment effort, National Republicans invited Mr. Keyser to Washington, D.C. and set up meetings to show him that they had donors and "folks on the soft money side who were ready to support him." Mr. Keyser attended the Republican Jewish Coalition's presidential forum luncheon during the trip and "received \$3 million in commitments of soft money to back his campaign at the event."⁴

B. LEGAL DISCUSSION

Under the Act and Commission regulations, an individual is a candidate if he or she "has received contributions aggregating in excess of \$5,000." The Act prohibits federal candidates from soliciting, receiving, directing, transferring, or spending "funds in connection with an election for Federal office, including funds for any federal election activity, unless the funds are subject to the limitations, prohibitions, and reporting requirements of this Act."⁵

Funds accepted "solely for the purpose of determining whether an individual should become a candidate are not contributions." The testing-the-waters exemption is "explicitly limited 'solely' to activities designed to evaluate a potential candidacy."⁶ This exemption does not apply to an individual who "raises funds in excess of what could reasonably be expected to be used for exploratory activities or undertakes activities designed to amass campaign funds that would be spent after he or she becomes a candidate."⁷

⁴ Elena Schneider, *NRSC Chasing New Colorado Senate Candidate*, Politico Pro (Dec. 10, 2015, 3:15 PM), <https://www.politicopro.com/campaigns/story/2015/12/republicans-recruiting-their-new-dream-colorado-senate-candidate-082754>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Ernest Luning, *Keyser Poised to Jump into Senate Race*, Colo. Statesman (Dec. 10, 2015), <http://www.coloradostatesman.com/996385-keyser-poised-jump-senate-race/>.

⁷ 52 U.S.C. § 30101(2)(A); FEC, Advisory Opinion 1983-05, at 1-2 (Mar. 10, 1983) ("The threshold for candidate status is reached when an individual . . . receives contributions . . . that . . . aggregate in excess of \$5,000.").

⁸ 52 U.S.C. § 30125(e)(1)(A); 11 C.F.R. § 300.61.

⁹ 11 C.F.R. § 100.72(a).

¹⁰ Payments Received for Testing the Waters Activities, 50 Fed. Reg. 9992, 9993 (Mar. 13, 1985).

¹¹ 11 C.F.R. § 100.7(b)(2).

1-004440-1825

Federal candidates are barred from soliciting funds outside the source restrictions and amount limitations of the Federal Election Campaign Act (the "Act") – also known as "soft money."¹⁰ This cycle, some Republican presidential candidates – most prominently, Jeb Bush – tried to evade the law by soliciting soft money funds prior to their formal announcements and claiming that they were exempt from the soft money solicitation ban during this "pre-candidacy" period. But in response to an advisory opinion request submitted earlier this year, the FEC's Office of General Counsel ("OGC") concluded that activity like this violated the law.¹¹ Individuals who solicited more than \$5,000 in soft money to support their prospective campaigns had triggered candidacy, the OGC reasoned, and therefore they had to abide by the restrictions on soliciting soft money.

By undertaking this discredited approach, Mr. Keyser appears to have violated federal law. Public reports are clear that the \$3 million in soft money that Mr. Keyser solicited were "to back his campaign."¹² Mr. Keyser did not ask for those funds "to determine whether [he] should become a candidate"; rather, he did so to strengthen his position in the expected-to-be crowded Republican primary.¹³ Thus, the money that he accepted at the luncheon is necessarily meant to "be spent after he . . . becomes a candidate" and were not exempt testing-the-waters funds.¹⁴ Mr. Keyser became a candidate as soon as he solicited more than \$5,000 in commitments to "back his campaign"; and because Mr. Keyser was a candidate, he was barred from soliciting soft money. Yet, according to news reports, that is precisely what he did.

¹⁰ *Id.* § 30125(e)(1)(A).

¹¹ FEC Adv. Op. 2015-9 (Draft A).

¹² Luning, *supra* note 2.

¹³ See Elena Scheinder, *Republicans Recruiting Combat Veteran in Colorado Senate*, Politico: Morning Score (Dec. 11, 2015, 10:00 AM) (noting that then-Rep. Keyser's \$3 million in soft money commitments "could come in handy in a crowded, highly unpredictable primary"), <http://www.politico.com/tipsheets/morning-score/2015/12/republicans-recruiting-combat-veteran-in-colorado-senate-democrats-get-candidates-in-va-10-ca-25-211709>.

¹⁴ § 100.7(b)(2).

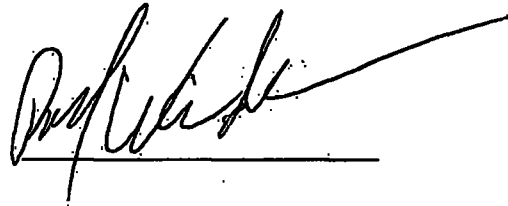
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Furthermore, if the outside groups follow through on their commitments and spend these soft money funds on public communications in support of Mr. Keyser that include the requisite content under 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(c), it will result in an illegal in-kind contribution. The news reports described above show that Mr. Keyser has either requested \$3 million in soft money to be spent "to back his campaign" or that he assented to a suggestion by a third party to spend such funds. Either way, this conduct satisfies the "conduct prong" under 11 C.F.R. § 109.21(d). Accordingly, Mr. Keyser should be on notice that the spending of these funds in support of his campaign would result in an illegal in-kind contribution.

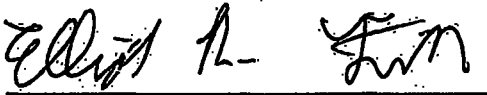
C. REQUESTED ACTION

As we have shown, Mr. Keyser violated the Act when he solicited soft money during his recent trip to Washington, D.C. We respectfully request that the Commission investigate this violation, and that Mr. Keyser be enjoined from further violations and be fined the maximum amount permitted by law.

Sincerely,



SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me this 28 day of January, 2016



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POLITICO



Sources familiar with Keyser's thinking say the state legislator is leaning toward a run. |
FACEBOOK

NRSC chasing new Colorado Senate candidate

By ELENA SCHNEIDER | 12/10/15 03:15 PM EST

Months after getting turned down by Rep. Mike Coffman and Aurora theater shooting prosecutor George Brauchler, national Republicans believe they have found a viable Colorado Senate challenger following a series of quiet recruitment meetings in Washington and Colorado.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee has set its sights on state Rep. Jon Keyser, a 34-year-old attorney and decorated combat veteran in Iraq and Afghanistan with a young, made-for-TV family and a bio perfectly tailored for a national security election. NRSC communications director Andrea Bozek said the committee "refute[s] they are recruiting anyone specific." But the committee has had multiple meetings with Keyser as he explores the jump to statewide office.

Sources familiar with Keyser's thinking say the state legislator is leaning toward a

run. They also say that even though Keyser didn't go looking for the opportunity, the stars have aligned in his favor.

"The possibility of having a nominee who has served on the front line of the war on terror transforms this race," said former state Rep. Rob Witwer, a Republican who served the same district as Keyser. "National security is no longer an issue — it's the issue."

Senate Republicans are on defense, protecting 21 incumbent senators in 2016, and Colorado Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet has long been one of the GOP's only potential targets next year. But the state party struggled in 2015 to overcome dramatic internal turmoil and a string of high-profile rejections for the Senate race, including Coffman, who represents a swing district in suburban Denver, and Brauchler, a district attorney covering some of the same turf.

Following Brauchler's decision not to run early this fall, Republicans went hunting for other potential candidates, including Doug Robinson (Mitt Romney's nephew and a managing director of the audit and tax consultancy KPMG) and Rep. Scott Tipton. Both are still considering a bid.

Yet even as they courted others, Republicans kept circling back to Keyser, whom Sen. Cory Gardner's team had connected with the NRSC. Ward Baker, the NRSC's executive director, met with Keyser in Colorado a day after the Republican presidential debate there in late October. After the meeting, Baker was convinced the Senate committee had found its man, according to two sources familiar with the meeting.

Baker disputed the characterization, emphasizing that many GOP candidates are competing in Colorado. "Whoever is saying this is wrong," Baker said. "We feel that there are multiple good candidates and we'll let the people of Colorado make that choice."

"I think Ward decided after that in-person meeting to make sure that John wasn't your average dumbass state legislator," said a Colorado Republican familiar with the meeting, granted anonymity to speak candidly about the race. The NRSC then invited Keyser to Washington, where it "set up meetings with people here to demonstrate they have donors, folks on the soft money side who are ready to support him," the

operative added.

With ISIS and terrorism continue to dominate headlines, Republicans say a national security-focused campaign could be an ideal platform for Keyser, a moderate with a strong military background.

"Read his bronze medal citation ... he's no joke on the intel side. He was kicking down doors in Iraq," said another Colorado Republican familiar with the recruitment process. It also doesn't hurt that he looks "like Don Draper," the operative said, referring to the star of *Mad Men*, played by Jon Hamm.

Republicans do have some concerns about running an inexperienced state representative for Senate. "People are worried he's potentially too young and he doesn't have a federal account, but he has the attributes of a Cory Gardner that are really attractive, like his energy and magnetism," said one Colorado GOP operative.

But Robinson, another possible candidate, doesn't offer enough of a contrast in the general election, the operative said. "Doug is being floated, but he isn't someone who offers as an attractive enough of a contrast to Michael Bennet as someone like Jon Keyser does."

Democrats are confident that Bennet, who sits on \$5.3 million in his campaign account and has a long head start building his political organization, will win reelection. But Republicans point to mediocre approval ratings — hovering at 37 percent in mid-November, according to a Quinnipiac University poll — as a sign of the incumbent's weakness.

Plus, even if Keyser runs with establishment support, he would face a crowded, divided and conservative primary field.

State Sen. Tim Neville, a grassroots favorite, will likely get backing from the ultra-conservative Rocky Mountain Gun Owners, where his son works as a lobbyist. Robert Blaha, a millionaire self-funder, pledged to join the race after Bennet voted in favor of the Iran nuclear deal, but he hasn't made the formal jump yet.

"I think Keyser has an interesting opportunity to bridge the gap between the activist base, based on his legislative record, and also appeal to the broader cross section

because of his military background, which will appeal to a lot of independent voters, too," said Ryan Call, a former Republican state party chairman. "But there are some, given the mood in the country right now, who may be skeptical of a candidate who's already been in government, and may want an outsider."

Republican Ryan Frazier, a former Aurora City councilman and a political television pundit, also got into the race in early November. Jefferson County Commissioner Donald Rosier is expected to enter the GOP primary today, the Denver Post reported. And El Paso County Commissioner Darryl Glenn and former Colorado Small Business Administration Director Greg Lopez are also in the race.

Eli Stokols contributed to this report.

Visit the Colorado Senate race page to track more information about the election. The Campaign Pro Race Dashboard tracks the candidates and consulting firms engaged in the top House, Senate and gubernatorial races of 2016.

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ELECTION

Jon Keyser announces 2016 Senate bid amid crowded Colorado field

Party has struggled to find well-known candidates to take on Michael Bennet

By Mark K. Matthews

The Denver Post (mailto:mmatthews@denverpost.com?subject=The Denver Post:)

POSTED: 01/11/2016 12:02:27 PM MST | UPDATED: 16 DAYS AGO

28 COMMENTS (http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_29370308/JON-KEYSER-ANNOUNCES-2016-SENATE-BID-AMID-CROWDED-DISQUALIFIED-THREAD)

WASHINGTON — Declaring that Colorado's 2016 contest for U.S. Senate is a "national security race," Air Force veteran and state Rep. Jon Keyser on Monday said he is joining a crowded Republican field that is competing for the chance to unseat Democratic incumbent Michael Bennet.

In a phone interview, Keyser — a Bronze Star recipient and veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan — said he was largely motivated to run because of Bennet's decision last year to support the administration's nuclear deal with Iran (http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_28757685/u-s-sen-in-michael-bennet-announce-support-iran).

"I think 2016 will be an absolutely pivotal year for our nation, and I'm running against Michael Bennet because I think he's dangerous," Keyser said. "He doesn't understand the enemies that we face."



As part of his announcement, Keyser said he planned to resign his job as a corporate lawyer (<http://www.hoganlovells.com/jonathan-keyser/>) for the firm Hogan Lovells as well as his seat in the legislature.

In doing so, Keyser took a veiled shot at one of his primary competitors:

(http://portal/article/html/imageDisplay.asp?www.denverpost.com/election/ci_28891304/tim-neville-contentItemRelationshipId=73098880/once-u-s-senate-bid-gop) — state Sen. Tim Neville, R-Littleton — who told The Denver Post last week that he would not step down during his U.S. Senate run.

Colorado Rep. Jon Keyser, R-Jefferson County, at the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum on Jan. 6, 2016. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

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"I don't think that anybody who is serious about beating Michael Bennet can do anything but dedicate 100 percent of their time" to that goal, said Keyser, adding that his statehouse resignation would be effective Jan. 25.

The entry of Keyser adds another twist to a GOP primary fight that has seen its share of ups and downs.

Much of last year was consumed by speculation that the field might include boldfaced names such as U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Aurora; U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Cortez; state Attorney General Cynthia Coffman; or noted prosecutor George Brauchler.

http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_28901660/brauchler-wont-seek-u-s-senate-bid-leaves — all of whom have declined to run.

Into the vacuum have stepped at least a half-dozen alternatives, which range from Keyser and Neville to businessman Robert Blaha (<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thepost/2016/01/07/robert-blaha-buys-iv-time-as-he-prepares-to-enter-u-s-senate-race/124370/>), a self-funded candidate who tried and failed to beat U.S. Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colorado Springs.

What Keyser adds to the mix is a dash of youth — he's 34 — and a résumé that is strong on one issue, national security, but is less developed elsewhere.

A biography released by his campaign noted his graduation from the Air Force Academy, his work as an intelligence officer and his continued service with the Air Force Reserve.



<http://portal/article/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=7309834>

Colorado Rep. Jon Keyser, R-Jefferson County with his daughter Eleanor, 2, at the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum January 08, 2015. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

"I've seen the enemy we face up close. Radical Islamist jihadists are a direct threat to our nation and to Colorado," the Morrison Republican said. "I know what it takes to defeat this enemy."

Specifically, he talked about rolling back the nuclear deal with Iran and taking the fight to the Islamic State and terrorist groups overseas.

"We also have to fight them there," he said. "We have a choice. They declared war on us. So either we get to fight them here, or we get to fight them there."

Asked whether this meant Keyser supports a new deployment of U.S. ground troops, a campaign aide wrote in a follow-up e-mail that Keyser believed it could be done "without a massive deployment of conventional U.S. ground forces."

Prior to Monday's announcement, Keyser met with the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and he could have a path forward as the establishment pick in the GOP primary.

Dick Wadhams, a former Colorado Republican chairman, said Keyser's bid was "tailor-made" for a political environment that he described as the most focused on national security since the election following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"His military background is going to be a huge asset for him. There is no doubt about that," Wadhams said.

But he added that Keyser — as well as other candidates — would be well-served to guard against the perception that he is too closely tied to GOP insiders.

"There is a strong anti-establishment fervor running through this party right now," he said.

Whoever wins the Republican primary likely will have a tough fight in Bennet.

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Not only does the Democratic incumbent benefit from running for re-election in a presidential year — which historically has been more favorable for Democrats — but Bennet is in a good place financially.

Bennet ended his third-quarter fundraising

(<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2015/10/14/democrat-michael-bennet-reports-1-6-million-campaign-haul/123329/>) with \$5.4 million cash on hand and, having recently served as chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, has access to a national network of well-heeled donors.

Plus, he has spent the past year partnering (http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_29313702/cory-gardner-uses-rookie-year-establish-himself-senate) with freshman U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., to bolster his bipartisan bona fides.

"No matter who emerges on their side, Michael Bennet will win in November because he's worked across party lines to get things done for Colorado," Andrew Zucker, a Colorado Democratic Party spokesman, said in a statement.

Mark K. Matthews: 202-662-8907, mmatthews@denverpost.com or @mkmatthews

Staff writer John Frank contributed to this report.

The GOP field

Several Republicans are eyeing the U.S. Senate. Among them:

Robert Blaha (<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2016/01/07/robert-blaha-huys-ty-time-as-he-prepares-to-enter-u-s-senate-race/124370/>), businessman

Ryan Frazier (http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_29108248/ryan-frazier-announces-bid-take-bennet-u-s), former Aurora city councilman

Darryl Glenn (<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2015/06/27/republican-darryl-glenn-michael-bennet/121550/>), El Paso County Commissioner

State Rep. Jon Keyser

Greg Lopez (<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2015/07/06/greg-lopez-former-sba-director-u-s-senate/121794/>), former SBA director in Colorado

State Sen. Tim Neville (<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2016/01/05/tim-neville-kicks-off-u-s-senate-bid-with-abortion-runs/124313/>)

Donald Rosier (<http://denver.ch9local.com/2015/12/10/gop-jeffco-commissioner-rosier-to-run-for-u-s-senate/>), Jefferson County commissioner

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Wednesday, January 27, 2016 | Print Edition

Keyser poised to jump into Senate race

by Ernest Luning on December 10, 2015

As security concerns rise, GOP eyes combat veteran Keyser

State Rep. Jon Keyser, R-Evergreen, an attorney and decorated Air Force reservist, is preparing to launch a likely-to-be well-funded campaign in a crowded but mostly lackluster primary field of Republicans hoping to challenge U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, bringing star quality and credibility to an election his backers believe will turn on national security.

"Republicans have been waiting for a first-tier quality candidate, and now they have one," said former state Rep. Rob Witwer, who held the House seat Keyser won last year. "Jon brings gravitas, real world experience and a fresh perspective. Most importantly, he can win."

"I'm strongly considering it," Keyser said in an interview with *The Colorado Statesman* this week. "Right now I'm focused on national security and serving our country in uniform as a member of the Air Force Reserve."

Keyser, who holds the rank of major in the Air Force Reserve, has been deployed on a training mission in Florida this month as part of a mission to combat terrorist and transnational criminal networks in Central and South America, a spokesman said. He returns to Colorado next week.

"There's not a campaign yet," Keyser. "But as I spend a few weeks serving in the military, I think now more than ever, our nation is at a crossroads and the threats we face are enormous. This is a pivotal time in our nation's history."

While Keyser maintains he'll make the decision whether to run over the holidays, sources close to him say to expect an announcement after the first of the year. And other Republicans with knowledge of the preparation for Keyser's campaign say to expect a big splash when he makes it official.



State Rep. Jon Keyser

Republicans have struggled to find a candidate of stature to take on Bennet, considered the lone vulnerable Democratic senator in next year's election. Pointing to recent polling they say puts Bennet in a worse position than Democrat Mark Udall was at the same time in the election cycle — U.S. Rep. Cory Gardner went on to unseat Udall by 2 points in a Republican wave year — top GOP strategists are privately crowing that Keyser brings national security credibility and a made-for-TV quality to a race that has so far mostly been lacking it.

The GOP primary has been dominated to date by conservative state Sen. Tim Neville, R-Littleton, who announced his run in late October and has strong grassroots support, but it's been growing on a near-weekly basis, with a fresh entry scheduled this week by Jefferson County Commissioner Don Rosier. Republicans in the running include El Paso County Commissioner Darryl Glenn and former Aurora Councilman Ryan Frazier. Businessman and former congressional candidate Robert Blaha is weighing a bid, as is El Paso County Commissioner Peggy Littleton and state Sen. Ray Scott, R-Grand Junction. Other Republicans are rumored to be considering a run.

Following a recent visit to Washington, D.C., where Keyser attended the Republican Jewish Coalition's presidential forum luncheon last week as an invited guest on a day off from his duties, he received \$3 million in commitments of soft money to back his campaign, said a source familiar with the matter.

A source in the Washington foreign policy community had high praise for Keyser after meeting him on the trip, saying he was "blown away" by the Colorado Republican. "He schooled them on the ground intel of the region," the source continued, saying Keyser has "absolute and complete foreign policy chops."

What's more, Keyser's background as a ground combat veteran in the war on terror — he was awarded a Bronze star and served in Iraq and Afghanistan — could shine in a race Republicans close to Keyser say will almost certainly be dominated by questions of national security, according to recent polling cited by his backers.

"I have first-hand experience on national security matters on things like Iran and Afghanistan,"

Keyser said. I'm afraid it's almost impossible to defeat an enemy some people in Washington don't even acknowledge exists. The fact is, we're in a global war against Islamic extremism. I've learned that dangerous times require serious leaders."

Allowing that recent events — the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, as well as across the Middle East and in North Africa — might have drawn increased attention to the matter, Keyser points out that he's been working to defeat terrorists since graduating the Air Force Academy after 9/11.

"This isn't a new issue for me. National security and terrorism has been something I've been focused on for 15 years. Recent events have certainly caught my attention, and I've been focused on those very closely, but this is something I've been dealing with for a very long time. This isn't new to me," he said.

Although he had trained to be a pilot, Keyser said the fact the country was involved in two simultaneous ground wars when he graduated encouraged him to consider a different path, serving in an elite special operations team that performed "capture-kill" missions.

"I did 107 successful capture-kills," he said, "direct action missions that happened typically in the middle of the night when we would blow the door off a house. We were going after leaders, we weren't going after street thugs. These were terrorists. These were guys who were plotting to kill Americans."

Then, his voice hardening, Keyser recalled his return stateside.

"I came back from Iraq, got a car and went to Arlington National Cemetery," he said. I went there to bury a teammate of mine who was killed on one of the last missions I was on. To me, it's very personal."

Turning his attention to state politics, Keyser said he was confident he'd be able to stand out in the primary, which will be decided in June.

"If I do decide to get in this race, absolutely there will be a place for me. Unfortunately, it will be because I have the expertise we require as a country," he said.

"Putting the military and national security aside," Keyser continued, "I think there are some really important votes and important philosophies that will separate me. The single most important vote separating fiscal conservatives from establishment conservatives was the vote on the budget, the largest in state history. I voted against it."

Neville voted for the state budget, Keyser backers are quick to point out.

Although pegged a rising star in the GOP, Keyser mostly kept a low profile during his first year in

the Legislature. He points to legislation he sponsored to repeal unnecessary laws and regulations

the Legislature. He points to legislation he sponsored to repeal unnecessary laws and regulations, audit government agencies and cut taxes. "Those are the things I ran on and those have been my priorities," he said, adding, "I've succeeded at the Capitol by working in a bipartisan fashion without compromising my principles."

Kelly Maher, executive director of conservative advocacy group Compass Colorado, stressed in an interview with *The Statesman* that she doesn't take sides in Republican primaries but nonetheless sounded dazzled by the prospect of a Keyser candidacy.

"Jon definitely has a lot of really great experience, both as a combat veteran and in the Legislature," she said. "I've heard a lot of great names for the Senate race. One thing I like about Jon is his juxtaposition to Michael Bennet. He understands what he believes and portrays that really well and would be a great counterpoint to Sen. Bennet."

Keyser, a Colorado native, was born in Salida and grew up around the state, including in Durango and Montrose. After graduating from the Air Force Academy, he worked oil rigs on the Western Slope to pay for his studies at the University of Denver School of Law — a contrast to Bennet, Maher said, who she called "the consummate East Coast liberal." Keyser practices corporate law at Hogan Lovells, one of the largest law firms in the world.

"One of the great things about Jon is he comes to the table with a lot of energy, like Cory Gardner," Maher said. "That is something Republicans definitely would like to recapture. Cory came into a race that a lot of people thought would be tough, and he came in smiling and positive and had that energy."

Keyser said he was inspired by Gardner's election last year, the first time a sitting senator from Colorado had been defeated in nearly four decades.

"I was elected to the House of Representatives because the electorate is hungry for nontraditional candidates that are ready to bear the torch and have fresh ideas. This is a new Republican Party. We have an opportunity in Colorado for a generational shift. We saw the first part of that in 2014, but I think that was the first wave, and I think it's going to continue."

While the election might be decided by national security concerns, Keyser added that he wasn't arguing the country stay on a permanent war footing.

"Something I think is important that people realize is, we don't have to live like this. If we acknowledge this threat and we defeat this threat, we don't have to live with enormous amounts of insecurity at home and abroad. There is a choice," he said.

"I'm looking forward to spending Christmas with my two kids and my dog and my wife, and we'll take a close look at what we're going to do in the next year. No matter what it is, I'm sure it'll involve public service."

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